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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001762

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2014

TAGS: PREL IZ BA

SUBJECT: BAHRAIN OFFERS TO HOST IRAQ FACTIONS MEETING

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe. Reason: 1.4 (b)(d)

11. (U) Bahrain Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed Al Khalifa, speaking at the November 22-23 Sharm El Sheikh conference on Iraq, reported Bahrain's readiness to host a meeting of all factions in Iraq prior to the scheduled January 30 elections in order to encourage broad participation in the vote. He noted that the King had first raised this idea in July 2003, when he expressed "Bahrain's readiness to host a national conference for all Iraqi factions and political tendencies to contribute to the success of the elections in Iraq."

12. (C) One day before Shaikh Mohammed's remarks, King Hamad told visiting Secretary of the Navy Gordon England that he had been thinking of inviting all political parties in Iraq to a conference in Bahrain. Bahrain, he said, is neutral and has no interests in Iraq, so it could offer a useful venue for such a conference. The idea behind the conference would be to help identify moderates from the Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds. If the moderates get support, he said, they can maneuver into the government. "We want to embrace and support and embrace the moderates."

13. (C) Attempts to develop more information or background on the proposal from the MFA yielded little. The senior MFA official in town, Undersecretary Yousif Mohammed Mahmoud, simply reiterated to the Ambassador what Shaikh Mohammed said -- that this was an idea that had first been proposed in July 2003. The Iraqi Ambassador told the Ambassador that the proposal was a surprise to him, and to his Foreign Ministry. In checking with Baghdad, he was told that, as an initial reaction, his government supported the idea in principle, but believed that the meeting should be held in Iraq, not outside the country.

14. (C) Comment. The King (and Shaikh Mohammed) will be in Washington on November 29 for meetings with the President and other senior USG officials. To the extent that Washington finds the proposal potentially useful or wishes to explore it further, the visit offers an excellent opportunity to do so.

15. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
MONROE